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WEBSTER SAYS SADDAM'S TERRORISTS WERE RECRUITED DURING WAR

By Jim Wolf

WASHINGTON, Sept 26, Reuter - Intelligence agencies around the world recruited some terrorists activated by Iraq during the Gulf War and that helped thwart planned attacks, former CIA Director William Webster said on Thursday.

Webster, who stepped down on September 1 to resume private law practice, said spy services around the world "identified teams sent out by Saddam Hussein and caused their arrest, detention, interrogation and in some cases recruitment."

"Some said we overestimated the threat of terrorism in Desert Storm and Desert Shield," he said, referring to the U.S.-led war that drove Iraq from Kuwait in February.

But it was worldwide cooperation that prevented Saddam's "plans for world terrorism from ever taking place," Webster told a breakfast of the Law and National Security standing committee of the American Bar Association.

"It's a story that badly needs to be told at the right time," Webster added. "Some day that tremendous story will be told."

In a later telephone interview, he declined to discuss the recruitments, saying such disclosures might jeopardize ongoing intelligence operations.

But he said no major guerrilla group, such as the Abu Nidal Organisation or the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, had become involved in a planned attack during the war.

"The heavy hitters apparently stood by to see how things would develop," he said in the interview. "These teams were not in that category."

Webster said U.S. intelligence identified a number of teams he said were sent by Saddam "and we worked with local authorities to defuse their operations."

Webster would not say whether the guerrillas in question had been based in Iraq or abroad.

In some cases, their plans went awry such as in a botched bombing in the Philippines. "In other cases, teams were arrested, some were detained," he said, declining to discuss specifics.

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